



Tuberculosis Elimination: Now Is the Time

WORLD TB DAY 2003

March 24

The History of World TB Day

In the late 19th century, tuberculosis (TB) killed one out of every seven people living in the United States and Europe. In Berlin on March 24, 1882, Dr. Robert Koch announced the discovery of the TB bacillus. At the time, his discovery was the most important step taken towards the control and elimination of this deadly disease.

In 1982, a century after Dr. Koch's announcement, the first World TB Day was sponsored by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Union Against TB and Lung Disease (IUATLD). The event was intended to raise awareness about the devastating health and economic consequences of TB, its impact on developing countries, and its continued tragic impact on global health.

World TB Day — Today

Among infectious diseases, TB remains the second leading killer in the world, with more than 2 million TB-related deaths each year. Hence, today's World TB Day is by no means a celebration. Instead, World TB Day is an occasion for countries around the world to raise awareness about the health threat presented by TB. It is a day to recognize the collaborative efforts of all countries involved in fighting TB and for all countries to spread the word that TB can be cured and, with diligent efforts and resources, eventually eliminated.

TB — Not a Disease of the Past

Many people think that TB is a disease of the past — an illness, like smallpox, that no longer threatens us today. However, with one third of the world's population estimated to be infected with the bacteria that causes TB, this ancient disease is very much with us today. TB bacteria are spread through the air from one person to another, usually when a person with active TB disease coughs or sneezes. People nearby may breathe in these bacteria and develop latent TB infection. Many people who have latent TB infection never develop TB disease. But, in other people, especially children and people with weakened immune systems, the bacteria can become active and cause TB disease.

There are medications that can prevent latent TB infection from progressing to active TB disease, as well as cure people who are sick with TB disease. Many countries worldwide are implementing highly effective TB control strategies in collaboration with the World Health Organization.

Global Facts about TB from “Global Tuberculosis Control: WHO Report, 2000”

TB — one of the world’s deadliest diseases:

- Each year, there are more than 2 million TB-related deaths worldwide.
- A disproportionate number of people who become sick with TB are those who are the most vulnerable in any society: children, the elderly, the poor, the homeless, racial/ethnic minorities, and people infected with HIV.
- Worldwide, TB is the leading killer of people who are HIV-infected, accounting for one third of AIDS deaths.
- In most of the developing world, TB is the single most common opportunistic infection for people living with AIDS.
- TB causes more deaths among women worldwide than all causes of maternal mortality.
- On average, someone in the world is newly infected with TB every second.
- Nearly one percent of the world's population is newly infected with TB each year.
- Overall, one third of the world's population is infected with the TB bacillus.
- Each year, 8 million people around the world become sick with TB disease.
- Every day, 20,000 people develop TB disease and 5,000 die.
- On average, one person dies of TB every 15 seconds.
- TB accounts for more than one quarter of all preventable adult deaths in developing countries.

For More Information:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchstp/tb>

World Health Organization: <http://www.who.int/gtb/>

International Union Against TB and Lung Disease: <http://www.iuatld.org>

American Lung Association: <http://www.lungusa.org/diseases>

Results Inc: <http://www.resultsusa.org>